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ABSTRACT

According to the 1999 annual surveys of technical and further education (TAFE) and university bachelor graduates in Australia, both sectors have experienced significant growth in the past 10 years (10-year growth rates of more than 70% and 41%, respectively). Within 6 months of graduation, 72.8% of TAFE graduates and 66.4% of university graduates were employed. A total of 87.7% of TAFE graduates were employed or in further study within 6 months of completing their course, whereas 91.7% of university graduates were employed or in further study within 4 months. Compared with TAFE graduates, university graduates were more likely to have undertaken their course on a full-time basis (39.3% versus 74.5%). On average, TAFE graduates were older than university graduates (the median ages of the two groups were 29 and 23 years, respectively). University graduates employed after graduation were nearly twice as likely to enter the full-time work force for the first time as TAFE graduates were (43.7% versus 23.9%). The respective percentages of TAFE and university graduates who expressed overall satisfaction with their course of study were 85.0% and 67.2%. The weekly earnings of 1999 TAFE and university graduates averaged $462 and $679, respectively. (MN)

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NCVER

Statistics 1999

TAFE and university graduates

At a Glance

Australian Vocational Education & Training

Some key findings

- 92.8% of TAFE graduates were in employment within six months of completing their course while for university graduates 66.4% were employed within four months of completing their course.
- 87.7% of TAFE graduates were employed or in further study within six months of completing their course compared to 91.7% of university graduates within four months.
- University graduates are more likely to have undertaken their course on a full-time basis (74.5%) than TAFE graduates (59.3%).
- TAFE graduates were on average older than university graduates, with the median age of respondent graduates for TAFE being 29 years and for university 23 years.
- University graduates employed after their course were almost twice as likely to enter the full-time workforce for the first time (43.7%) than TAFE graduates (23.9%).
- A majority of graduates from both sectors expressed satisfaction with the overall quality of their course.

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TAFE and university graduates: At a glance

This publication brings together some of the findings of the annual surveys of TAFE and university bachelor graduates (see notes on back page – About the Surveys), and outlines some of the similarities and differences between the two sectors. The comparisons show that the sectors are very different, but complementary, meeting training needs and producing positive employment outcomes for a diverse range of clients.

Background

Size of the sectors

In terms of students, the vocational education and training (VET) sector, of which TAFE is a part, is larger than the Higher Education sector, however both have experienced considerable growth over the past 10 years.

- The VET sector has grown by more than 70 per cent over the past 10 years, to about 1.65 million students. Most of these, 1.23 million, were in vocational programs in TAFE institutions and other government providers in Australia in 1999. Just over 113,000 students# had completed a course of at least 200 hours or one semester in length in 1998 and were eligible for an AQF qualification.
- The Higher Education sector has grown by over 41% over the past 10 years to about 686,000 students. Almost 130,000# graduated in 1998 with a bachelor degree (pass, graduate or honours) or a diploma.
- The large number of part-time students in VET means that in terms of full-time equivalent numbers, the VET sector is actually smaller than the Higher Education sector.

excluding overseas students

Distribution of institutes and universities

- The TAFE system has 85 institutes with over 1,100 campuses covering geographically diverse cities and towns throughout Australia, while the university system has a smaller network of 39 universities with about 100 campuses in the larger population centres.

Course particulars

TAFE and university courses are quite different in entry requirements, duration, delivery method and qualification awarded.

- TAFE courses leading to a qualification vary widely in length of study, although more commonly they are relatively short in duration (the average is 10 months), with graduates able to complete a qualification within a year of full-time or part-time study. Apprenticeships are longer, generally of three or four years' duration.
- TAFE courses can be delivered either at an institute or on a work site with a mixture of formal classes, on-the-job training and supervised work. Courses are designed for full or part-time attendance, generally do not prescribe a prior level of schooling and have an array of levels of qualifications that clients can choose at the start. Some students start TAFE courses while they are still at school, either as part of their school program or as an extra curricular activity.

- University offers a range of degrees and some diplomas, but most enrolments are in bachelor courses. These courses are designed for full or part-time attendance (with some exceptions such as medicine requiring full-time), are generally taken over three years of full-time study or longer part-time, and mostly require a higher school certificate with a prescribed score for entry purposes.

Students

The two sectors cater for different groups of students.

- University students are much younger than TAFE students. Almost two thirds of university graduates are in the 20 to 24 years age group soon after graduation while for TAFE this group comprised only one quarter of the population of graduates. University has almost no graduates in the under 19 age group while TAFE has 13.8%. TAFE graduates' age profile tends to more closely reflect the community age profile.
- TAFE provides courses to meet a wide range of needs – entry level training, specific skills training for industry, upgrading of skills while in the workplace, change of career training, re-training for re-entry to the labour force and training while on the job (eg apprentices). TAFE students are far more likely to undertake their training as part-time study.
- University provides mainly bachelor courses for school leavers, particularly those students seeking to pursue careers in the professions and academic research, as well as those seeking a more extensive education experience. University students are almost twice as likely to undertake full-time study than TAFE students.

Qualifications

The range of qualifications and awards that TAFE and university offer are different but complementary; TAFE offers qualifications from AQF Certificate I up to AQF Advanced Diploma which can then lead into university degree awards. University, offering mainly degree awards, has qualifications ranging from AQF Diploma to Doctoral Degree.

- More than four in five university graduates received a pass bachelor degree (minimum of three years' full time study). TAFE graduates, however, were more widely spread across the award range, with the greatest proportion, but less than one in three, qualifying for an AQF Certificate III or equivalent (trade certificate).

Employment

Overall employment outcomes for graduates from TAFE and university are similar, with over two thirds of graduates employed soon after completing their course. However, TAFE and university cater to different occupation and industry sectors of the labour market.

- TAFE graduates are concentrated in the trades, clerical and service occupations while university graduates are concentrated in the professional and management occupations.
- TAFE graduates are more likely to be employed in manufacturing, construction, health and community services and retail trade industries, while university graduates are more likely to be employed in finance, property and business services, education and health and community services.

Profile of graduates

TAFE graduates are a more diverse group than university graduates across a range of characteristics, including gender balance, age distribution, indigenous status and non-English speaking background (Table 1).

The major areas of divergence are:

- Higher proportions of graduates in university are female (61.0%) compared with TAFE (56.2%).
- TAFE graduates are older (median age 29 years) than university graduates (23 years).
- Very few university graduates are aged under 19, while about 1 in 7 TAFE graduates fall into this group.
- The majority of university bachelor degree graduates attended university on a full-time basis (74.5%) while for TAFE only 39.3% of graduates attended full-time.
- TAFE graduates are more likely to have a non-English speaking (30.9%) or indigenous (1.8%) background than university graduates (20.8% and 0.6% respectively).
- University graduates are far more likely to move to undertake their study (17.1%) compared to TAFE graduates (6.3%).
- More university graduates (70.1%) have completed high school compared to TAFE graduates (54.4%).

Table 1: Graduates' demographic profile, TAFE and university, Australia 1999

	TAFE graduates %	University graduates %
Males	43.8	38.9
Females	56.2	61.0
Age at survey date:		
15-19 years	13.8	0.1
20-24 years	24.9	61.5
25-29 years	11.1	14.6
30-34 years	9.5	6.9
35-39 years	11.6	5.6
40 years and over	25.6	10.1
Median age of graduates	29 years	23 years
Undertook study on a full-time basis#	39.3	74.5
Indigenous Australians	1.8	0.6
Non-English speaking background*	30.9	20.8
Relocate to do course	6.3	17.1
Pre course schooling – Completed high school	54.4	70.1

TAFE and university figures may not be directly comparable. TAFE calculation of full-time study (for the purposes of this publication) is nominally 16 hours or more per week. University definition of full-time study is not specific. Graduates report further study in a question which nominates full-time or part-time study categories.

* Some difference in collecting this data item may result in small reporting differences. TAFE is based on language spoken at home by graduate or language of parents. University is based on self-identification as non-English speaking background.

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Qualifications

When comparing the qualifications awarded to TAFE and university graduates (Table 2), it becomes apparent that there is virtually no overlap between the sectors. The six AQF levels – AQF Certificate I to AQF Advanced Diploma – are of direct relevance to TAFE training, and the AQF Bachelor's Degree classification level is related mostly to university training.

The differences in qualifications awarded are:

- Most university graduates (85.1%) have undertaken courses leading to a Pass Bachelor Degree. Courses taken by TAFE graduates lead to a wider range of AQF qualifications, from AQF Certificate I to AQF Advanced Diploma.
- The proportion of TAFE graduates whose prior qualification was a bachelor degree, while relatively small (8.6% in 1999), has increased since 1997 (7.2%).

Three-quarters of university graduates studied full-time for their course, compared to just over one-third of TAFE graduates.

TAFE and university graduates undertook different types of courses; the majority of TAFE graduates completed studies for an AQF Certificate, whereas the majority of university graduates completed studies for a pass bachelor degree.

Table 2: Qualifications awarded to TAFE and university graduates, Australia 1999

	TAFE graduates %	University graduates %
Pass bachelor degree, graduate bachelor	–	86.6
Honours bachelor degree	–	12.1
AQF Diploma, associate & advanced diploma	17.8	1.2
AQF Certificate IV & equivalent	19.5	–
AQF Certificate III & equivalent	30.4	–
AQF Certificate II & I	21.5	–
Other Certificates	10.7	–
Total [includes 'not stated']	**100.0**	**100.0**

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Employment outcomes: Labour force status after course

Since university and TAFE graduates have different backgrounds and experiences, it is reasonable to expect that the employment outcomes and further studies undertaken will vary.

Table 3 indicates the labour force status for TAFE and university graduates soon after graduation, and for the Australian population aged 15 and over as at May 1999. The table shows that the labour force outcomes for TAFE and university differ in some respects, and also vary from the Australian average, as follows:

- the proportion of TAFE graduates employed after completing their course (72.8%) was higher than for university (66.4%), the majority in full-time employment. Both sectors had higher employment rates than the Australian population.
- the proportion of TAFE graduates unemployed and looking for full-time or part-time work (13.0%) was higher than for university graduates (5.9%).
- the proportion of TAFE graduates not in the labour force (ie not looking for work) (13.5%) was half that for university (27.6%). Of these university graduates, most (85.7%) were in full-time study while for TAFE it was just over a third (39.1% - see next section for details).

Table 3: Labour force status, TAFE and university graduates and Australian population, Australia 1999

	TAFE graduates* %	University graduates %	Australian population** %
Employed:	72.8	66.4	58.3
Full-time	42.1	52.6	42.8
Part-time	18.0	13.9	15.5
Unemployed:	13.0	5.9	4.6
Seeking full-time work	8.5	5.2	3.4
Seeking part-time work	4.6	0.7	1.2
Not in labour force	13.5	27.6	37.1
Total [includes 'not stated']	100.0	100.0	100.0

* Employed includes 'not stated' for full-time and part-time.
** ABS Labour Force Australia, May 1999. Labour force status of civilian population aged 15 and over, Australia, May 1999.
NOTE: Graduates could also be involved in further study, especially those not in the labour force.

If employed graduates are further divided into those in their first full-time job, the numbers differ considerably between TAFE and university, reflecting an intrinsic difference in the sectors. In 1999 nearly one quarter of employed TAFE graduates (23.9%) were in their first full-time job, while this figure was almost double (43.7%) for employed university graduates.

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Further study outcomes

After graduation many TAFE and university graduates undertake further study to obtain additional or higher qualifications. More TAFE graduates than university graduates are undertaking some type of further study, but more university graduates than TAFE are studying full-time. Table 4 shows the percentage of graduates undertaking further study, and full-time further study, as well as the combined percentage in work or further study.

About 40% of TAFE graduates and 33% of university graduates undertake further study once they have completed their course.

After completing their course, the majority of TAFE and university graduates are either employed or doing further study.

- Undertaking either full-time or part-time further study are 40.3% of TAFE graduates and 33.4% of university graduates.
- 13.3% of TAFE graduates undertake full-time further study compared to 23.7% for university.
- Of the university graduates going on to further study, the majority go to university (81.0%) while for TAFE graduates, 21.2% go to university and the remainder mostly to TAFE.
- After completing their respective courses the overwhelming majority of TAFE (87.7%) and university (91.7%) graduates are in work or study of some kind, mostly full-time work or full-time further study.
- As a proportion of graduates employed after completing their course, more TAFE graduates are working and undertaking further study (34.9%) than university graduates (12.3%).

Table 4: Employment and further study, TAFE and university graduates, Australia 1999

	TAFE graduates %	University graduates %
Undertaking further study*	40.3	33.4
In full-time further study*#	13.3	23.7
Working or in further study*	87.7	91.7
Working and in further study	34.9	12.3

* in each outcome category, figures represent the proportion of all graduates

TAFE and university figures may not be directly comparable. TAFE calculation of full-time study (for the purposes of this publication) is nominally 16 hours or more per week. University definition of full-time study is not specific. Graduates report further study in a question which nominates full time or part time study categories.

Occupation outcomes

There are major differences between the occupation outcomes in the two sectors, suggesting that TAFE and university prepare graduates for different occupational segments of the labour market. University graduates are concentrated in only a few occupations, particularly the higher skilled occupations such as Professionals and Associate professionals. TAFE graduates, however, are more evenly spread across the range of occupations, with some concentration in the technical occupations such as Tradespersons, and in the lower skilled occupations of Intermediate and Elementary clerical, sales and service workers. Table 5 below highlights these differences.

The majority of university graduates are employed in one occupation – the Professionals category (59.3%). This is more than five times greater than the proportion of TAFE graduates (11.5%) employed in this category, and more than three times the proportion for the Australian workforce (17.8%). In addition, over 75% of university graduates are in the three occupations with the highest skill levels, Managers and administrators, Professionals, and Associate professionals, about three times that of TAFE graduates (26.2%). Very few university graduates are employed in lower skilled occupations. This concentration of university graduates in the higher skilled occupations has an impact on the comparison of earnings of graduates from the two sectors.

TAFE graduates, while more evenly spread than university graduates, are most concentrated in the Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers (25.2%) and the Tradespersons and related workers occupations (20.5%).

Compared to total employment in Australia, TAFE graduates are under-represented in the Managers and administrators, Professionals and Intermediate production and transport workers occupations, while university graduates are under-represented in Tradespersons, Advanced clerical and service workers and Intermediate and Elementary clerical, sales and service workers occupations.

Table 5: Occupation of employed graduates, TAFE and university, Australia 1999

Occupation category	TAFE graduates	University graduates	Employed persons, Australia May 1999*
	%	%	%
Managers and administrators	3.2	5.5	7.3
Professionals	11.5	59.3	17.8
Associate professionals	11.5	11.0	11.1
Tradespersons and related workers	20.5	0.2	13.2
Advanced clerical and service workers	3.5	2.8	4.3
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers**	25.2	16.8	17.2
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers**	8.2	–	10.2
Intermediate production and transport workers***	3.9	1.2	9.0
Labourers and related workers***	6.3	–	9.8
Total [includes 'not stated']	100.0	100.0	100.0

* ABS Labour Force Australia, May, 1999

** Occupation categories for university combined - Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers combined with Elementary clerical, sales and service workers. Therefore the figures for the two sectors are not comparable.

*** Occupation categories for university combined – Intermediate production and transport workers combined with Labourers and related workers. Therefore the figures for the two sectors are not comparable.

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Industry of employment

Like the occupational segmentation, TAFE and university supply skilled labour to different industries. University graduates are clustered in only a few industries, whereas TAFE graduates are distributed somewhat more evenly across the range of industries. Table 6 shows the industry of employment for TAFE and university graduates and the clustering referred to.

About 60% of university graduates were employed in just four industries, Finance and insurance and Property and business services (combined 23.2%), Health and community services (19.9%) and Education (16.8%). TAFE graduates are less clustered, but are more likely to work in Health and community services (14.1%), Retail trade (12.4%) and Manufacturing (11.5%) industries.

Compared to total Australian workforce employment patterns, TAFE graduates are over-represented in two industries, Accommodation, cafes and restaurants and Health and community services, and are under-represented in four industries, Agriculture, forestry and fishing, Wholesale and Retail trade and Transport and storage.

University graduates, when compared to total Australian workforce employment patterns, are over-represented in the service-based industries of Finance and insurance and Property and business services, Government administration and defence, Education and Health and community services. They are under-represented in Agriculture, forestry and fishing, Manufacturing, Construction, Wholesale and Retail trade, and Transport and storage.

Table 6: Industry of employment for graduates, TAFE and university, Australia 1999

Industry category *	TAFE graduates %	University graduates %	Employed persons Australia, May 1999** %
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	2.4	2.0	5.0
Mining	0.8	1.0	0.9
Manufacturing	11.5	4.7	12.2
Electricity, gas & water supply	0.9	0.7	0.8
Construction	7.3	1.6	7.4
Wholesale and Retail trade#	15.2	6.0	21.1
Accommodation, cafes & restaurants	6.1	3.0	4.8
Transport & storage	2.6	1.1	4.8
Communications	1.2	1.4	1.8
Finance & insurance and Property & business services#	11.8	23.2	14.4
Government administration & defence	3.6	8.0	4.1
Education	6.5	16.8	7.2
Health & community services	14.1	19.9	9.3
Cultural & recreational services	2.4	3.0	2.5
Personal & other services	3.8	2.9	3.8
Total [includes 'not stated']	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

* Classified on the basis of the business or service carried out by the graduate's employer according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classifications (ANZSIC).

** ABS, Labour Force Australia, May 1999.

Two industries combined, in keeping with university sector reporting, to enable comparisons between the TAFE and university sectors.

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Graduate earnings

Generally, longer education and training leads to higher earnings, and occupations with higher level skills pay more than those with lower level skills. Graduate earnings for both TAFE and university vary according to the occupation in which they are employed, but TAFE graduate earnings vary considerably more and are lower than for university graduates. In 1999, TAFE graduates in their first full-time job earned $462 on average per week, while university graduates earned $635 on average per week.

Table 7 shows average weekly earnings of TAFE and university graduates in their first full-time job by sex and occupation. Some occupational groups' earnings are combined for university because of survey coding practices. As previously stated, TAFE graduates are spread across all occupations, whereas university numbers are concentrated in only a few occupations.

Table 7: Average weekly earnings of first full-time job holders, TAFE and university graduates, Australia 1999

Category – male/female, occupation	TAFE graduates $	University graduates * $
Males	497	679
Females	413	606
Persons	**462**	**635**
Occupation:		
Managers and administrators	• 695	• 758
Professionals	• 640	• 650
Associate professionals	586	637
Tradespersons and related workers	455	–
Advanced clerical and service workers	425	588
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers **	423	529
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers **	331	–
Intermediate production and transport workers ***	487	560
Labourers and related workers ***	412	–

* For university graduates weekly earnings have been derived from annual salary data.

• See notes on relative standard error on back page.

** Occupation categories for university combined – Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers combined with Elementary clerical, sales and service workers. Therefore the salaries for the two sectors are not directly comparable.

*** Occupation categories for university combined – Intermediate production and transport workers combined with Labourers and related workers. Therefore the salaries for the two sectors are not directly comparable.

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From Table 7 it can be seen that, for first full-time job holders:

- Managers and administrators occupations are the highest paid for all graduates in their first full-time job, TAFE graduates earning on average $695 per week and university graduates $758 per week.
- In the higher skilled occupations (Professionals, Managers and administrators) average weekly earnings in the two sectors are roughly comparable, whereas in the lower skilled occupations university graduates earn more than TAFE graduates.
- Of the three highest paid occupations, Managers and administrators, Professionals, and Associate professionals, over 80% of university graduates in their first full-time job are in these three occupations and only 16.7% of TAFE graduates.
- The lowest paid occupation for graduates in their first full-time job is the combined Intermediate and elementary clerical, sales and service workers for university graduates ($529 per week), and Elementary clerical, sales and service workers for TAFE graduates ($331 per week).
- There is a large difference in earnings between TAFE and university graduates in the Advanced clerical and service workers occupations and the other lower skills occupations. Some of this difference can be attributed to a gender impact – there is a higher proportion of female graduates from the TAFE sector in these occupations.

Overall satisfaction with course

Overall satisfaction with the quality of the course was similar for both university and TAFE graduates. TAFE graduates rated the overall quality of their course as 'above average' or 'excellent' (a score of 6 or above on a 10 point scale) in 85.0% of cases, while 67.2% of university graduates agreed or strongly agreed that overall, they were satisfied with the quality of their course.

Conclusion

The data show that the two sectors are very different in a range of characteristics, and in employment and further study outcomes. Clearly, for the most part, the two sectors service very different industry sectors and provide employment within different occupations. TAFE has slightly higher employment outcomes than university, and its graduates are employed in a much broader range of occupations and industries.

In terms of further study, more university graduates are more likely to go on to full-time study. They are also more likely to undertake full-time study at a university, whereas TAFE graduates are more likely to continue in part-time study at a university or a TAFE institute. Increasingly however, university graduates are undertaking further study at TAFE.

In terms of overall satisfaction, graduates of both sectors report satisfaction with their courses, which would seem to suggest that the sectors are providing complementary education, training and employment outcomes to match community and economic needs.

About the surveys

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA) conduct annual surveys of new graduates of TAFE and university respectively. These surveys measure a range of characteristics, including employment and further study outcomes, soon after graduates' completion of their course.

In 1999 NCVER surveyed over 63,000 new TAFE graduates in Australia who successfully completed their course during 1998 and graduated with a qualification of at least 200 hours or one semester in duration. The TAFE survey collected information at the end of May 1999 for all graduates completing their course requirements during 1998. All TAFE figures listed in the publication relate to this group of TAFE students unless otherwise specified.

The GCCA surveyed almost 60,000 new university bachelor graduates who qualified in 1998 from all Australian universities (within a wider survey covering graduates at all levels who qualified for the award of a degree or diploma in 1998). The university survey collected information at the end of October 1998 for graduates completing their course in the first half of 1998, and at the end of April 1999 for graduates completing their course in the second half of 1998. For the purposes of this comparative study, only university bachelor graduates, and not the entire graduate population, are included in the analysis. This group comprises those who qualified for Pass, Graduate or Honours bachelor degrees or an undergraduate diploma.

The surveys provide estimates of the results that would be found if all graduates in Australia had been interviewed. As the survey estimates are based on information obtained from only a sample of graduates, an allowance for sampling variability should be made when using the results.

One measure of sampling variability is the relative standard error, which is obtained by expressing the standard error as a percentage of the estimate to which it refers. The relative standard error is a useful measure, in that it provides an immediate indication of the percentage errors likely to have occurred due to sampling, and avoids the need to refer also to the size of the estimate. Unless marked with a ▲ the estimates in this publication have a relative standard error of less than 25%.

This publication has been produced with the co-operation of the Graduate Careers Council of Australia, which has provided the university graduate data on which the tables have been based.

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